

The Story of Everglades City; A History for Younger Readers

by MARYA REPKO

Everglades City was once the most important place in Collier County ...

It was the County Seat. The County judge held trials in the Court House and the Sheriff kept prisoners in the County Jail. The newspaper and the telephone company had offices here. The first bank was here. There was even a streetcar that ran on electricity.

It was a place to have fun. There were dances and movies in the Community Center. The Inn served delicious food. Famous visitors came to the Rod & Gun to go fishing.

Before that, the early settlers lived here. They were real pioneers. They farmed and hunted and fished for their food. They traded with the Indians. There were no roads. They took their vegetables by boat to sell in Key West. They got their mail and supplies by boat. It was a hard life but they grew up wise and happy.

Author Marya Repko grew up in Hadlyme, Connecticut, but spent most of her adult life in Europe as a software engineer. When she discovered Everglades City, she felt at home immediately and moved there after retirement in 2000. She is active in the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation and founder of ECity Publishing.

This book was written for the students at our local school. It is a condensed and simplified version of my publication "A Brief History of the Everglades City Area". I have left out some of the details but added many more pictures. I hope you enjoy learning about our history!

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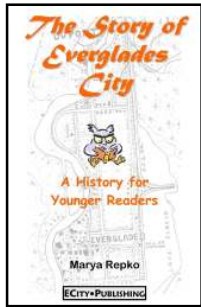
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EARLY DAYS, 1859-1881

This area was all swamp when it joined the new State of Florida in 1859. The only people living in the Glades were Indians. They were hiding from the U.S. Army because they did not want to be sent to reservations in the West. There were Army forts along both coasts of Florida. For example, Fort Myers was built to protect white settlers from Billy Bowlegs.

The Civil War began in 1860. Escaped slaves came to hide in the swamp. They made friends with the Indians, who taught them how to live in the wilderness. The black men taught the Indians to speak English so they could talk to the white men.

The other people who hid in the Glades were men who ran away from the Armies. They did not want to fight in the Civil War. Key West was on the side of the Unionists. It was an important harbor and was the seat of Monroe County. Northerners could go there and feel safe. There were a lot of men running away. They were sent to farm on Cape Sable. Some of them went from Cape Sable into the Ten Thousand Islands.

Two men who came here were the Weeks brothers. Their family lived in Virginia on a good farm. When the Civil War began, John was in New York on business. He was drafted into the Northern Army. His brother Madison joined the Southern Army at home in Virginia. One day, after a battle, Madison saw that his brother John had been captured. They decided to run away together.